

*Washington, DC* - As families gear up for Memorial Day weekend, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) is working to ensure that members of the armed services are receiving the strong support they need and deserve. Hinchey today voted to pass the National Defense Authorization Act, which contains provisions to raise troop pay, expand TRICARE health coverage for children of service members, increase college loan repayments and provide numerous other benefits to military members and their families.

"With Memorial Day just around the corner, this is a good time for us to reflect on the enormous sacrifices that so many brave men and women have made in service to our country," said Hinchey. "It is also a time to recognize the need to do everything we can to support current members of the military. This bill, which I voted to pass in the House today, is a good step forward. It provides a much needed pay raise while improving health care and several other benefits for service members and their families."

The legislation which passed the House today provides a pay raise for active duty troops, increases the family separation allowance for troops who are deployed away from their families, and increases hostile fire and imminent danger pay for the first time since 2004. The bill also expands TRICARE health coverage to include adult dependent children up to age 26 - an action that many private insurers have already taken in response to the health care reform law, which Hinchey strongly supported and voted to pass.

The Defense Authorization bill also expands college loan repayment benefits and establishes a pilot program to offer alternative career paths to military officers to ensure a broader range of experiences and a longer career. The bill also creates a pilot program to help military spouses take advantage of their personal skill sets to identify and obtain desirable and portable careers.

To address the serious issue of sexual assault in the military, the bill includes 28 provisions to implement into law many of the recommendations of the Defense Task Force on Sexual Assault.

It also authorizes an additional special one-time payment to seriously wounded service members to pay for the relocation costs of their caregivers.

In April, Hinchey voted to pass the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act, which provides support for families who care for disabled, ill or injured veterans, and enhances health services for 1.8 million women veterans. This law, which was signed by the president earlier this month, also includes an expansion of mental health services and improved access to health care for veterans in rural areas.

Hinchey is also a cosponsor of the Veteran Employment Assistance Act, which would improve employment, training, and placement services for veterans -- especially those serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, also strongly supported by Hinchey, provides a tax credit to businesses that hire recently discharged veterans who have been out of work for more than six months.

Hinchey joined the U.S. Navy after graduating from high school, serving in the Pacific Ocean on the destroyer U.S.S. Marshall.